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MRS MOSES SMITH

CHICAGO, ILL.
WOMAN'S BOARD OF MISSIONS OF THE INTERIOR.
1898.

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# Woman Under the Ethnic Religions.

BY MRS. MOSES SMITH.

*(A paper read before the World's Congress of Missions, in Art Institute, Chicago, October 4, 1893.*

For two weeks we have been listening to the presentation of religions. We have heard philosophies of religion profound and subtile, to some minds fascinating in their grace and mysticism. It may be wholesome, if not so agreeable to have our attention now called to the practical workings of some of these religions and their effect on the life and destiny of man. Moreover, as missionary workers, it is wise for us to know not only the present needs of the people, but the religious forces which long centuries have wrought into every tissue of their thought, feeling and action.

Without question religion is the supreme force in history. Religion creates the ideals and aspirations, and so chisels the character of mankind. In the order of nature the worshiper becomes like the being worshiped. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

The world has known many religions, some of them eminent for the tremendous power with which they have held millions in their sway over centuries of time; eminent also for profound philosophy, lofty ideals, and sometimes a high morality. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave us the test for Himself and His teaching: "By their fruits ye shall know them." The conditions of society, temporal and spiritual, are the fruits by which any religious system may be known.

In the nature of things the factor that most universally moulds society is woman. The boy is father of the man, but the woman is mother of the boy, hence the study of the teaching of any religion concerning woman, and of her character and place in society as the result of that religion, is vital both to the correct understanding of the system and of what it has wrought for the world.

The most venerable and possibly the most powerful Ethnic religion is Brahmanism. Rising in India when that was the land of literature and art, the home of the cultured Aryans, for fifteen centuries this religion wrought unhindered on the people. At first a simple nature worship, it degenerated into a pantheon in which all the powers of nature were gods. On this was built a sacerdotalism with caste and idol worship. It became an oppressive tyranny. At this juncture, 500 years before

Christ, a new and forcible factor entered the life of the people in the birth of a king's son, Gautama Buddha, known in history as the great Reformer of Brahmanism. I have not time to speak of the fierce theological war that ensued (400 years), or of the bright *coup d'etat* of the Brahmans in finally accepting Buddha as the ninth incarnation of Vishnu.

Each of these systems evinces profound thought and lofty ideals, Buddhism a high morality. Each contains elements of truth, and each has been a tremendous power in the history of the race. Striving for supremacy on the same field, the result was a coalition. Together they enter the stream of history under the name of Hinduism. The time has been long enough, the field favorable and broad enough for the completest results, and the present condition of society in India affords an opportunity to see the results.

Sir Monier Williams, the distinguished Sanscrit scholar of Oxford, says: "Although India in the early periods of Brahmanism was a land of literature and science, the present characteristics are poverty, ignorance and superstition. Whatever profound thoughts lay about the roots of Hinduism, it held and still holds the 280,000,000 of India in the bondage of degradation, cruelty and immorality." "The

average income per individual is less than that of any other civilized country, barely $13.50 per year, against $20 even for the Turks, $165 for every Englishman, and $200 for every man, woman and child in the United States."* Dr. John Short, Surgeon General of India, long resident among the people says: "Wherever the Hindu religion predominates, there immorality and debauchery run riot."

Teachings.

The Code of Manu is the highest religious authority among the Hindus. You ask a Hindu about the date and age of his great law-giver and he quickly replies, "He was son of the self-existent Brahm." Manu's whole teaching about woman is based on the assumption of her impurity. For instance, a Brahman is enjoined "to suspend reading the Veda if a woman comes in sight." Her ear is not pure enough to hear what the vilest man may read. "Though unobservant of approved usage, or enamoured of another woman, or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must constantly be revered as a god by a virtuous wife."†

"Let the wife who wishes to perform sacred oblation wash the feet of her husband and drink the water, for the husband is to the wife greater than Vishnu." Again, "Women have no business with the text of a sacred book,

*Rev. N. G. Clark, D. D. †Dharma Sastra, chap. 5, page 154.

and having no evidence of law, and no knowledge of expiatory texts, sinful women must be foul as falsehood itself, and this is a fixed rule."* And it has remained fixed for forty-three centuries.

Seclusion.

The modern Brahmans like to claim that the present custom of immuring their wives in prison-like rooms had its origin in Mohammedan invasion. This is certainly not the whole truth, for in the unalterable law of Manu, written 900 years before Christ, we read, "A woman is not allowed to go out of the house without the consent of her husband, she may not laugh without a veil over her face or look out of a door or a window." "It may be that when the Mohammedans came, some fifteen centuries after these laws had been in force, they put the crown on the arch already waiting for them. They may have tightened the chains by which woman was already enslaved,"† but the teachings of Manu are sufficient to account for all we see in India to-day.

Child Marriage.

The people of the Western World have long wondered why the Hindus were so tenacious of their, to us, revolting customs of child marriage. It is only when we learn that it is not

*Dharma Sastra, chap. 5, page 155, 156.

†Wilkins' Modern Hinduism, page 326.

simply a custom but a part of their religion that we apprehend the reason. The sacred laws of the Hindu declare: "If a daughter is married at the age of six, the father is certain to ascend to the highest heaven. If the daughter is not married before seven, the father will only reach the second heaven. If a daughter is not married until the age of ten, the father can only attain the lowest place assigned the blest. If a girl is not married until she is eleven years of age, all her progenitors for six generations will suffer pain and penalties."* When recently an effort was made to induce the Government to raise the legal age of marriage to twelve years, great excitement prevailed. The Brahmans set apart days of fasting and prayer. Multitudes came in processions to the temples, in some cases beating their breasts and calling aloud to the gods to spare them from such calamity.

The worst featnre of the system of child marriage is seen among the Kulin Brahmans, the highest of all. Girls in these families must not marry into a lower caste, and the supply of Kulins is limited, so fathers who have not money to induce some young men to marry their daughters, are compelled to give their little girls to those who make a living by being husbands. Thus a child of twelve may be

*Women of the Orient, page 135.

given as the fortieth or fiftieth wife of some old man. Although it is certain she will soon be a widow, even that is preferable to allowing her to remain unmarried.

Infanticide.

"The code of Manu forbids a woman to read the scripture or offer prayer by herself. She is to have no individuality. She exists only in her father or her husband; without a husband she is soulless." This doctrine bears its legitimate fruit in the custom of murdering infant girls. It is easy reasoning, that it is better to murder a soulless child than not to be able to betroth her and so bring disgrace on the whole family.

Widows.

"The Hindu sacred books reach their climax of cruelty in the requirements concerning the widow. She may have only been a betrothed infant or a child of a few years. It makes no difference." The Shasters teach that if the widow burns herself alive on the funeral pile of her husband, even though he had killed a Brahman, that most heinous of deeds, she expiates the crime. For long centuries widows have been a literal burnt offering for the redemption of husbands. The English Government has prohibited the suttee, but being considered by the family as one rejected of the gods, the widow's life is such a degradation, such a sorrow, it would seem merciful to let her die. Manu wrote, "Let not a widow

ever pronounce the name of another man, for by remarriage she brings disgrace on herself here below, and shall be excluded from the seat of her Lord." To-day in India under the Hindu religion the widow may not take food more than once in the day. She must go without food and water for forty-eight hours twice in the month. At a meeting of the highest religious court a few years ago it was gravely decreed that, if acting on medical advice, a widow did sometimes take a little water on fast day, the offense might be condoned. O, the burning pathos of the Hindu widow's prayer: "O God, let no more women be born in this land." India has now 21,000,000 of widows, nearly 100,000 of them under nine years.

The Nautch Girl.

Hinduism touches its lowest depths in the degradation of woman in what the enlightened Hindu, Mr. Mozoomdar, called in the Parliament of Religions "consecrated prostitution" of the Nautch or dancing girls in the temples. The subject is too delicate and too horrible for me to speak of in detail, but as it is a much honored part of this religion it cannot be omitted. The Brahmans claim that it is a most sacred service, having its origin in prehistoric ages in a promise made by Vishnu himself. In a few words the reason and method is this: Parents who have a son very ill will vow to some

god that if the son's life is spared they will consecrate a little girl to the temple; or the parents believing that honor or wealth will be the result, consecrate a girl to the god; or the Brahmans select the most beautiful little girls, the parents rejoicing in the religious honor.

From the hour of consecration the little thing is treated with peculiar respect. She alone of the girls of the family is taught to read. When she becomes ten or twelve years old, her father, mother and nearest relatives take her to the great temple. They go with the priest into the inner shrine. The girl places her hand into the god's hand, the priest repeats certain prayers and charms. He then hangs a string of cowrie shells around the girl's neck and the poor little thing repeats after him her marriage vow, which vow is to prostitute herself to any pilgrim to the shrine who demands it.* The position of these religious prostitutes in Hindu society is so highly respectable that no festival or wedding is celebrated without their presence. They are asked to tie the wifely ornaments on the neck of the bride. They being married to a god can never be widowed and their touch is lucky. In elegant attire with costly jewels and perfumes, charmingly graceful, they lead their wretched lives, bring great sums into the treasury of the

*Prof. T. M. Lindsay, University of Glasgow.

temple, and, as they are religiously taught, accumulate a store of blessing for themselves in a future state. John Short, M. D., Surgeon General of India, Member of Anthropological Society, London, says: "The Nautch girl is recognized and patronized by the Hindu religion."

There was a time in this fair eastern land when women were in a position of respect similar to that among the ancient Hebrews. Husband and wife were equal in all domestic, social and religious life. "The Brahmans have themselves preserved the record of women engaging in philosophical discussions, and disconcerting their most celebrated doctors by the depths of their objections."* Some of the Vedic hymns were composed by women. By degrees the condition of woman has deteriorated until by the law of their religion she is "now consigned to a degradation probably without a parallel in the history of the race." It is true, Buddha, in the sixth century before Christ, taught that men and women were equal, but even his influence has never been strong enough to reform the Brahmanical laws about women. The Hindus have a saying: "Education is good, as milk is good, but milk given to a snake becomes venom, and education given to a woman becomes poison."

*J. Murray Mitchell, LL. D.

A quotation from the personal experience of Prof. T. M. Lindsay, D. D., so pertinently sums up the Hindu creed about women that I quote it. "I remember asking a learned Vedantist, who had spent two days in teaching me something about his belief—a man who had read Spinoza, Berkeley and Hegel—whether he could give me any definite proposition which all the people who were Hindus could accept. He very readily said, 'That woman is a wicked animal. That the cow is a holy animal.'" No brilliant presentation of Vedic learning, no poetic picture of Brahman or Buddhist philosophy so recently heard in the Parliament of Religions, will prevent the world from arraigning Hinduism for cherishing, in the sacred name of religion, the grossest vices, and basely degrading woman and all society. "By their fruits ye shall know them."

Religions of China.

In the Empire of China, under a government distinguished for its stability and justness, among a people spoken of before Christ as "Those who dwell apart," and known from the time of Ptolemy as just, mild, frugal and industrious, comprising one-fourth the human race; three religions of confessed power, not as rivals, but as co-ordinate and supplemental, have for many centuries sought to solve the problem of life, death and immortality. The time has been long enough, the condi-

tions favorable for a perfect experimemt. Confucianism, the oldest of the three, gave what is probably the best code of morals man ever gave to men. Confucius was himself an earnest reformer. The late Dr. Legge, professor of Chinese in the University of Oxford, says: "Confucius saw the terrible wretchedness of his people and set himself to find a remedy. Yet to the one principal cause of the misery of the masses, polygamy and the low social condition of women, he gave no thought." In his treatise on human relations, in that of husband and wife, he regards the wife as the servant of the husband and enjoins absolute obedience. During all these forty-three centuries, while Confucius has done much for good government and has set some high moral standards for men, women have reaped no benefit from the teachings of the sage.

Taoism.

Lao-tsze, the founder of Taoism, a religion of no little power in China, made no effort to elevate the people, and his religious system does not recognize the existence of woman. In the beginning, the work of Taoism, was to repress the passions.

"*Not to act* is the source of all power,"* was an ever present thesis. To-day Taoism is a system of magic and spiritism.

*Ten Great Religions. James Freeman Clark.

Buddhism.

Much vaunted, "gentle Buddha," gives to the women of China one only hope. Through its doctrine of transmigration of souls, it is possible that through obedience to her husband and his relatives, and the birth of a son, she may in some future aeon have the happiness of being returned to this world a man. If a man commits a crime he may be returned to earth a woman. The one fervent prayer of the women as they crowd the Buddhist temple is, that they may be returned to earth as men. When the women apply to the priests for instruction they are told "When you die your soul will pass into the land of spirits where it may remain ages before it is allowed to return to earth and inhabit the body of a man. You will need money to pay toll on the bridges, and you must fee the ferrymen, especially the lily boat to cross the lake of blood."* (This fee is $30.) The priests claim to have opened communication with the spirit land and their drafts are honored there. In one part of the temple these drafts are sold, the priests placing the seal of the Temple on them. Of the $400,000,000 annually given for idol worship in China, at least seven-eighths is given by women and three-fourths of that by women too poor to obtain enough of even the coarsest food.

*China and the Chinese. Rev. J. L. Nevius.

Marriage.

The customs and principles of marriage among any people are the exponents of woman's place in the social scale. Chinese women are bought and sold in marriage. The wife is forever subject to her husband and his parents; only when she becomes the mother of sons does she receive the respect of the family. Divorce is practically at the pleasure of the husband, or he may sell her to another man. Undesired at birth, liable to be sold while a child for prostitution, never educated, her low estate naturally leads to the crime of infanticide. Little wonder that they innocently ask, "Why save the life of a girl?"

What to-day is the place of this vast Empire among the nations? The combined forces of these three religions working for twenty-three centuries upon one-fourth of the human race has shed no light on the two great foci, the family into which every human being is born, and that immortality to which every mortal soul aspires. Nor has any single ray of light emanated for the enlightenment of the other three-fourths of mankind? Alas, *a nation cannot rise higher than its mothers.*

Religions of Japan.

Shintoism the primal cult of the Japanese, has no system of morals and takes little or no notice of woman's existence.

About the year 552 of the Christian era, Buddhism entered the Mikado's empire, and after a thousand years of struggle with Shintoism, gained supremacy.

"While Japanese women are not so pitiably degraded as in India or China, we read in their book of "Instruction for Woman," "Woman is the creature of man." "A woman's husband is her God." Concubinage, "divorce if the wife is not obedient to her husband's parents" or is unkind to a concubine, and the selling of young daughters for prostitution, tell the story.

The Japanese Buddhist Bible teaches that "the sins of three thousand of the worst men all together do not equal the sins of one woman." Even in "Buddhism's best Gospel" among the articles given by Buddha himself we find only this negative hope. "Although a woman may not be born into My Country, yet the woman who hears the name of Amida Buddha, and is excited thereby to the hatred of the condition of woman, and an earnest longing for the salvation of others, shall not be re-born as a woman."*

For this crumb of comfort Japanese women are devoted to the worship of Buddha. The timbers of the great Buddhist temple building in Kyoto said to cost three mill-

*Muripapiu Byo. Luhhavati Sutrasl

ion dollars, are all hauled to the ground and raised into the structure by ropes made of hair which devoted women have cut off and sent for this purpose.

Among the Ainu, the aboriginal inhabitants of the island of Yesso, the women do not worship the gods, even separately. "The reason commonly given among them is, that the men fear the prayers of the women in general, and of their wives in particular."*

Mohammedanism.

There are few more pathetic scenes in history than the casting out of Hagar and Ishmael from the polygamous home of Abraham. "Abraham rose up early in the morning and took bread and a bottle of water" and gave it unto Hagar and her child "and sent them away." The picture is realistic; that erect, well poised figure, with the bottle on her shoulder, that dark Egyptian face with chiseled lines of sorrow, illuminated now with righteous anger, as she gives one last haughty look toward Sarah's tent and turns toward the wilderness of Beersheba. Very soon the curtain lifts upon the desert scene. The water is spent. Hagar places the child under the scant shade of a shrub and lifting up her voice, weeping cries out, "Let me not see the death of the child." At this crisis a voice is heard from heaven: "Lift up the lad,

*Rev, John Bachelor, Church Missionary Society.

I will make of him a great nation." And they dwelt in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took him a wife out of the land of the Egyptians.

The years go by and centuries are numbered. We find the fulfilled promise of a "great nation" in a people in whose veins on the one side is filtering the blood of the great Abraham, mingling with the larger proportion of the idolatrous Egyptian, nomadic in habit, with a genius for conquest, with a language distinguished for softness and copiousness, with a literature of great antiquity and high poetical merit, dwelling in the Peninsula of Arabia. Of these people, in the fifth century of the Christian era, Mohammed, the founder of Islam, was born. A youth of great sincerity and purity, his domestic life with his wife, Khadija, is as beautiful as could be found among a non-Christian people. But when at the age of fifty-two he sets himself up as a prophet, and becomes the husband of eleven wives, we find him guilty of the grossest crimes, robbery, murder, and butchery which rival the Emperor Nero.

"Judged by the smallness of the means at his disposal, and the extent and permanence of his work, his name is illustrious. By his will he abolished a cherished idolatry and bowed to himself the hearts of his countrymen, and

gave to the world a creed which has been a tremendous force on the destinies of the nations. To the impulse he gave, numberless dynasties owe their existence. Fair cities, stately palaces and temples have arisen. At a thousand shrines the voice of the faithful invokes blessings on him."* "He saw with a correct spiritual vision the elemental truth of all religion. There is only one God."† For twelve centuries the teachings of Mohammed have borne fruit in human lives. Not only in the land of its birth, but in many lands.

Koran.

We turn the pages of the Koran with eager hope that we may find in the writings of this man some teaching that shall lead to the uplifting of woman. The most hopeful word the Koran has for woman is in the second chapter: "Whoso doeth good works and is a believer, whether male or female, shall be admitted to Paradise." The practical exegesis of a woman's "good works" is, obedience to the husband. Without that good work she can not enter Paradise. Again in the fourth chapter, entitled "Women," we read, "Men shall have pre-eminence above women, because of those advantages wherein God hath caused the one to excel the other, and for that which they expend of their *substance in maintain-*

*Marcus Dodd. †Dean Milman.

*ing their wives.* The honest women are obedient, careful in the absence of their husbands, for that God preserveth them by *committing them to the care and protection of the men.* But those, whose perverseness ye shall be apprehensive of, rebuke and remove them into separate apartments and chastise them." The degraded and degrading practice of scourging and beating wives, having the sanction of the Koran, will be, in the words of Dr. Jessup, "indulged in so long as Islam as a faith prevails."

Polygamy.

Note the polygamous teaching of the Koran. "Every Moslem is allowed four free wives and as many concubines as his right hand possess;" and the faithful are positively promised that in Paradise they shall have seventy-two houris for wives, besides the wives they have here.

Divorce.

According to the Koran, the husband may divorce a wife without warning or assigning a reason. The husband has only to say, "Thou art divorced." Even life may be taken at the will of the husband. Woman is practically a chattel. A Mohammedan being asked, "What is the price you pay for a good wife," replied; "About the same as for a mule, twelve or fourteen pounds."

Estimate. A polite Mohammedan would not speak of his wife without using the same apologetic formula he would use if he were speaking of a donkey or a hog. Indeed so degrading is the orthodox Mohammedan's idea of womanhood, we cannot mention it here. The Koran says nothing about a woman's praying, therefore she is excluded from the Mosques at the hours of prayer. Behold a religion that practically excludes one-half the human race! It was not until Mohammed was fifty-eight years of age, and the husband of many wives, and had under his own roof experienced what the Moslem women of to-day declare, when there is more than one wife "there is fire in the house," that he wrote in the Koran the "ordinance of veil," that badge of jealous subjugation, which marks an era in the degradation of women in all the Orient. The regulation costume shrouds the women from the head to the ankle in a cotton or silk sheet of black or white. Around the head is tied a yard long linen or cotton veil in which before the eyes is a piece of open work about the size of a finger which is the only look out and ventilator. No part, not even a hand or an eye, can be seen.

See the picture; with fearful foot-steps, with no hope in man, with little knowledge of the "All Father," no knowl-

edge of Him who said, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden," for twelve cycling centuries, an unceasing ghostly procession has marched from birth to death.

Theckla, a Christian martyr of the first century, standing in the arena at Antioch, bemoans in her prayer the shame of all women in her unclothing. The clothing of woman in the veil of the false prophet is a shame to all womanhood. "The whole life of a Mohammedan woman is mirrored in that pathetic Arabic proverb 'The threshold weeps for forty days whenever a girl is born.'" The spider's web which once saved the life of Mohammed has, as by the hand of a Vulcan, been forged into a chain which in this nineteenth century in the name of religion dares hold woman, and through her, 200,000,000 of mankind in a singularly hopeless degradation.

Persia.

The sacred books of Zoroaster give women a higher place than any other Ethnic religion. Women are given the same religious rites as men, yet even here "woman's first duty is obedience to her husband, and disobedience is a crime so heinous as to receive punishment after death."*

On the death of a chief in Central Africa hundreds of

*The Vendidas.

his wives are buried alive,* a sacrifice for his convenicnce in the spirit land.

Miss Mary C. Collins, who has lived many years among the North American Indians, says, "The Indian is a religious man, and it is his religion that makes him cruel."

The story becomes monotonous. All non-Christian religions degrade women, and as woman is, so is all society.

To-day the all-sufficient Christian evidence, is the immeasurable contrast between heathen and Christian society.

"THE WORKS THAT I DO BEAR WITNESS OF ME, THAT THE FATHER HATH SENT ME."—*John 5:36.*

*Cameron.